

Rep. Lofgren Co-Signs Letter to Chertoff Questioning Passport Card's Security Features

Washington, D.C. – Today, Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) cosigned a letter with Rep. Jane Harman (D-CA) to Secretary of Homeland Security Chertoff questioning the adequacy of the security and anti-counterfeiting features on the new U.S. Passport Card. The letter also questions the posting of the Passport Card's specifications and artwork on the internet. Full text of the letter below:

March 14, 2008

Secretary Michael Chertoff
United States Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

The U.S. Department of State has posted the new U.S. Passport Card specifications and artwork in detail on its website. This decision has a direct impact on the security of our nation and we are deeply concerned about the possible use of this information to create fake identification cards. Further, the inadequate security features on the passport card are not sufficiently resistant to counterfeit and fraud and we are concerned that the Department of State has recommended similar cards to other agencies.

In addition to the U.S. Department of State posting the specifications and artwork of the U.S. Passport Card, including information on its security features, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has also posted specifications of machine readable travel documents on their website. We find this troubling in an era when counterfeiters are constantly searching the internet for information on such valuable cards that will be used to gain entry into the U.S.

The passport card will facilitate entry and expedite document processing at U.S. land and sea ports-of-entry when arriving from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. Despite the fact that the U.S. Department of State's website states that "[w]e are taking every care to ensure that this passport card is as secure as current technology permits," it is our understanding that the State Department has decided not to use the most advanced form of laser technology. We recognize that while laser technology will be used on the U.S. Passport Card, it is the type that does not allow for changes, but it apparently may be duplicated.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has already proposed a new design for the Permanent Resident Card that includes the most up-to-date laser technology, we find it troubling that, in a recent letter (attached), the Deputy Commissioner at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection has recently suggested to USCIS that reconsider this decision. We would greatly appreciate an explanation for why an agency would want to lower security standards, especially after state-of-the-art security features on the Permanent Resident Card have already been proposed.

This is not the first time the contract with the U.S. Passport Card has been called into question. The contract was originally awarded to General Dynamics, but after that contract fell through, it was awarded to L-1 Identity Solutions Inc. Although the Department of State feels that L-1 has demonstrated that it can meet all of the specifications for the card and its production, by releasing that information to the public, the program has been compromised.

Finally, effective January 31, 2008, Canadian citizens will be able to present Trusted Traveler Cards to gain entry into the U.S. Unfortunately, we understand that SENTRI and NEXUS cards are made in China and may be simply erased with nail polish remover. Manufacturing cards these cards outside of the United States that contain minimal physical security is counterintuitive to creating open channels and securing the boarder for low risk travelers.

The U.S. Department of State has created a significant security risk by awarding a contract for a Passport Card that possesses inadequate protections and then compounded that risk by posting the specifications and artwork on its website. We request that the Passport Card webpage be immediately taken down, the contract for the Passport Card cancelled, and a new RFP issued for a Passport Card which includes the security features necessary to prevent counterfeit and fraud.

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren

Jane Harman

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren is serving her seventh term in Congress representing most of the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County. She serves as Chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law. She also Chairs the House Administration Subcommittee on Elections and serves on the House Homeland Security Committee. Congresswoman Lofgren is Chair of the California Democratic Congressional Delegation consisting of 34 Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives from California.

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<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[1]<!--[endif]--> <http://mrtd.icao.int/content/view/33/202/> (last accessed on March 14, 2008).

<!--[if !supportFootnotes]-->[2]<!--[endif]--> http://travel.state.gov/passport/ppt_card/ppt_card_3921.html (last accessed on March 14, 2008).